



Lab Character: Who We Are

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Keeping an eye on safety at the Laboratory's nuclear facilities

Jerry George of the Deployed Environment, Safety, and Health Division (DESH) exudes energy and intensity as he navigates Los Alamos National Laboratory's most elaborate nuclear facility, which is tightly wrapped in a security bubble of x-ray machines, metal detectors and stringent protocols. He moves and speaks with purpose, but he is also highly personable, looking people in the eye while listening intently before speaking.

For the past seven years or so, Jerry has worked as the group leader for environment, safety and health at TA-55 Facility Operations. Facilities under Jerry's purview include the Laboratory's Plutonium Facility, the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Facility, the Radiological Laboratory Utility Office Building, the Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility and a handful of other facilities.

These can be the most challenging places to work at the Laboratory, because nuclear facilities bring a level of complexity, regulation and disciplined operations that layer each day with extra steps and cautions.

Jerry's job is to carry out the environment, safety and health program at TA-55 Facility Operations, so the "programmatic folks" have the tools to carry out the Laboratory's mission—to assure the safety, security and effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear deterrent—as safely and compliantly as possible.

Jerry cut his teeth in nuclear operations while serving in the United States Navy. "When I got out, I went to work in Denver for about a year," he says, "then I came to Los Alamos, where I started off as a radiological control technician, an RCT."

Jerry says the Laboratory is supportive when it comes to pursuing higher education. "Los Alamos is great about sending people to school," he explains, "so I took my shot and got a master's degree. I then worked for places associated with radiological engineering and radiation protection services before I entered management as a team leader. Things progressed and here I am today, a group leader."

Keeping people safe and facilities operational

A big part of Jerry's job involves striking the balance of keeping people safe and ensuring that facilities remain operational to meet the Lab's national security mission.

“To be perfectly honest, my business is not a risk-free operation,” Jerry says. “We do our best every day to understand the hazards, engage and support the workers, and manage the risks as safely and compliantly as possible, I tell my group members that if they have uncertainty, then stop/pause work immediately. But for me it does not end there — the next words from my group members who stopped/paused work should be not to worry, that we are here to help find a solution to the issue so that work can resume compliantly, safely and as quickly as possible.”

“We,” in this case, refers to everyone in his group.

Like any true leader, Jerry is earnestly devoted. “I have two families. There’s my home family and there’s my work family — that’s what TA-55 is, one big family. And I strive to keep both safe because I love them both,” he says.

Radiation Protection Division Leader Stephanie Archuleta echoes Jerry’s tenacity in striking the balance of worker safety and streamlined facility operations. “I have worked closely with Jerry for the last seven years,” she says, “and throughout this time I have been impressed with his commitment as an environment, safety and health manager, specifically his knowledge of and passion for radiation protection, not only from a procedural compliance perspective, but also from his dedication to keeping safe our workers, facilities and the public. He is adamant about implementing a strong radiation protection program, and he does not discriminate or favor who must follow the rules.”

Introspection is key when performing Jerry’s job. One of the traits Stephanie admires about Jerry is his ability to self-reflect. “Jerry is the first person to evaluate his own part of any situation and take personal accountability,” she says. “He always strives to improve his own performance and that of those around him, all in the name of worker safety.”

Making every day a good day

Although there are some patterns to Jerry’s daily schedule, he says there is never a “typical” day when working at TA-55.

“I get to work around 6:30 every morning, and from there I attend a seven o’clock call-in with other members of the Facility Operations Director, and then I participate in a 7:45 call-in to cover any environment, safety and health issues and ongoing projects,” Jerry says. “Once the call-ins are done, it comes down to the challenges of the day. I do whatever I can from a worker safety perspective to ensure that our programmatic customers can continue to carry out the Laboratory’s important mission.”

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